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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ACCRA 002533

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SUBJECT: ONE YEAR LATER: NARCOTICS COMMITTEE
RECOMMENDATIONS NOT IMPLEMENTED

REF: A) 2006 ACCRA 2386 B) ACCRA 2477 C) ACCRA 2402
D) ACCRA 2426 E) ACCRA 2140 F) ACCRA 2244
G) ACCRA 2273 H) ACCRA 2096 I) ACCRA 2392

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PAMELA E. BRIDGEWATER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Just over a year ago, the GOG released the Georgina Wood Committee report in response to a public outcry after several embarrassing cocaine scandals in 2005. The GOG endorsed the report and pledged to quickly implement its proposals, but it has largely failed to do so. Most key recommendations have not been implemented and one was implemented only after assistance from the UK. GOG efforts to combat narcotics remain poorly resourced and the GOG lacks an overarching strategy to combat the problem. Perhaps most seriously, the GOG does not appear to have the political will to go after the barons despite the fact that high-level GOG officials have told us they know their identities. Corruption and a lackadaisical attitude toward narcotics also thwart progress. While the GOG has taken a few positive steps recently, including cooperating with the U.S. to arrest and expel two Afghan traffickers, it must redouble its efforts and treat the problem more seriously if it wishes to avoid the attendant problems that come with becoming a major transit point for narcotics. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On September 29, 2006, with much fanfare, the GOG publicly released the Georgina Wood Committee report, which listed numerous recommendations for the GOG to implement after the fall out from the 2005 missing cocaine scandal involving the MV Benjamin and other cases(ref A). These scandals revealed high level complicity in cocaine trafficking and raised awareness on the level of narcotics flowing through Ghana. The blue ribbon Committee interviewed 40 individuals over a 12-week period and investigated the MV Benjamin and East Legon cocaine cases which received considerable local media coverage. As reported in ref B and septel, two Ghanaians were convicted and sentenced to 15 years hard labor for their role in the MV Benjamin case and two Venezuelans were convicted for possession of cocaine in the East Legon case. Two other trials related to the MV Benjamin case are ongoing.

¶3. (C) Despite the clamor for reform after the Wood report was issued, and despite the GOG's public commitment to implement all the Committee's recommendations, it has largely failed to do so. The following key recommendations remain outstanding:

-- The Committee recommends that as a matter of urgency, the status of the Narcotics Control Board (NACOB) be critically examined and enhanced to enable it to meet the growing challenges of the drug trade.

-- The Committee recommends that a high powered national task force be set up to examine the problem thoroughly.

-- The Committee recommends that a reasonably well resourced Navy and equally well-resourced Air Force is necessary, if the war against the drug trade is to succeed.

-- The Committee recommends the setting up of a well-resourced Special Court to expeditiously dispose of all drug related cases.

-- The Committee strongly recommends the public recognition of patriotic acts of its citizens. To this end, the Committee recommends the setting up of a fund for adequately rewarding informants.

-- The Committee recommends that assets be seized from those convicted of narcotics offenses and be plowed back into communities who contributed to the arrests.

¶4. (C) The only recommendations that appear to have been applied relate to the arrests of individuals in the MV Benjamin and East Legon case and a recommendation concerning public awareness campaigns. However, even these recommendations have only been half-heartedly implemented. For example, prosecutors did not charge Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Kofi Boakye, who implicated himself in cocaine trafficking during a taped conversation played in court, despite the Committee's urging. The judge in this case, while announcing guilty verdicts for two of the defendants, said Boakye is guilty and expressed his distaste for Attorney General Joe Ghartey's refusal to charge him (ref C). The public outreach recommendation was only implemented after Ghana requested assistance from the UK as reported in ref B.

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¶5. (C) Ghana's inability or unwillingness to implement the Wood Committee's recommendations has meant it missed an opportunity to seize momentum in the war on narcotics. The citizenry was shocked at the 2005 scandals and the GOG had public support to go after major barons. As we see it, the GOG faces three main challenges in its efforts to combat narcotics: lack of resources, lack of a coherent national strategy, and the inability, or unwillingness, to go after major traffickers. The Wood Committee report generally addressed the first two challenges, but it carefully avoided the third.

¶6. (C) On the resource front, the lead agency on narcotics, NACOB, is under-funded and its officers are poorly paid and often poorly trained. Low pay opens the door to corruption, and inadequately trained officers are unable to perform effectively. For example, UK officials with Operation Westbridge, a UK program that attempts to interdict narcotics shipments at Ghana's airport, have repeatedly bemoaned the fact that NACOB officers are often rotated out of the airport once they have gained competency in their tasks. NACOB has also been unable to repair the two USG donated "itemisers" at the airport when they have broken. The UK repaired them once and EUCOM has agreed to repair them most recently. They are presently working, but were out of service for over one year. NACOB officials say they do not have the funding to repair them and demur when someone suggests they ask for additional funding to maintain equipment.

¶7. (C) The lack of a coherent national strategy dovetails with the GOG's inability or unwillingness to go after the drug barons. Investigations seem to focus on small time couriers and long-term investigations are rarely carried out. One Ghana Police contact confided that the GOG lacks the will to go after the barons. This was made more evident when working level contacts and the Secretary to the President D.K. Osei told us that the GOG knows the identities of the major drug barons (ref D). While Osei did tell us recently after the arrest of a Ghanaian in a combined DEA/Ghana Police Operation that he hopes to go after more drug barons, working

level contacts have told us that there is no political will to go after the big fish. One NACOB official told us to expect very little from narcotics investigations until after the 2008 elections (ref E). According to this view, if narcotics arrests occur and are published in the paper, it hurts the ruling NPP's image since other parties would use the articles to allege that the NPP has allowed narcotics trafficking to flourish under its reign. Regardless of the reason, it seems that the GOG has made a calculated decision not to go after the barons.

¶ 8. (C) In this regard, it is worth noting that opposition politicians, including National Democratic Congress candidate John Atta Mills, have been highly critical of the ruling NPP's efforts on combating narcotics. In a September meeting, Mills suggested to the Ambassador that the significant funds being expended by NPP candidates may be linked to narcotics trafficking (ref H). An NPP Presidential candidate also told us Kufuor is financing favorite Alan Kyerematen's campaign through corruptly obtained funds (ref I).

¶ 9. (C) Corruption and the GOG attitude toward narcotics also factor into the GOG outlook toward anti narcotics efforts. While it is difficult to determine the scale of corruption on narcotics in Ghana, it appears to be endemic. For example, in the MV Benjamin cases, an Assistant Commissioner of Police, Kofi Boakye, is on tape discussing why he was not informed of this large shipment of cocaine entering Ghana. Some contacts have suggested that he was never charged because he may be able to implicate high-level individuals in narcotics dealing. Continuing on this theme, President Kufuor has asked us to share sensitive narcotics information only with his office, because he does not know whom to trust when it comes to narcotics. Attitude is another concern and many GOG officials do not seem to grasp the scope of the problem and its potential side effects. The President's office and a few other contacts seem to grasp the seriousness of the issue at times, but even D.K. Osei, the Secretary to the President, told us during the recent arrests of the two Afghan traffickers (refs C and D) that after this case, "we can all take a rest."

¶ 10. (C) All things considered, the GOG has taken some positive steps in the past several months. For example, the Ghana Police have relieved hundreds of officers for suspected participation in narcotics offenses (ref B). The GOG, through the President's office, also handled the arrest and subsequent expulsion of the two Afghans smoothly as well as the arrest of another Ghanaian involved with the Afghans, although it remains to be seen how these extraditions will be

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carried out. The convictions in the East Legon and MV Benjamin cases are also noteworthy, despite their shortcomings. However, the GOG still has a long way to go in its battle against narcotics, and must find the political will to tackle the problem if it is to address this problem with the seriousness it merits.

BRIDGEWATER